



皇帝湯

SOUL FOOD
FOR 85







I COME TO MY FAMILY'S SOUL

(*After a translation of
Xavier Valcarcel's "Doppelgänger" poem
by Roque Raquel Solas Rivera*)

I come to my family's soul.
I come through her double doors.
She beckons me.
She pulls me in to walk past
Formica counters and tables.
She put napkins in my pocket.
She feeds me a teaspoon of sugar.
She tells me to smell the coffee, freshly made.
She guides me to the back booth.

I come to Great China,
Ai Joong Wah, heart
of my family's soul.
I hear oil spit and sputter,
stir frying ginger and garlic
in the giant wok.
I taste pencil-thin refrigerated strands of floured-
dusted noodles.
I touch hot spoons, forks,
knives, cleanly washed
by the taciturn dishwasher.

I hear heavy chopping
of the cleaver,
a cigarette-smoking cook wields.
I see my mother plating golden
hued pancakes.
I catch a glimpse of my father weighing fresh
slabs of meat
in the small space behind the kitchen.

I smile at our cooks, sizzling
veal cutlets at the grill.
I greet them in my native
dialect, *Hoisan-wa*.
I say “*Daw Sin*,” good morning.
Ready to work alongside them,
I tighten my cloth apron
on my back.
I bite into crumbling baking
soda biscuits to start my day.
Sated, I lick my fingers
and turn around.

My family’s soul.

FLO OYWONG

a poem read by Flo on October 28, 2023,
A Birthday Celebration at Imperial Soup,
723 Webster Street, Oakland, CA





